DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 402 060 PS 024 830

AUTHOR Saurino, Dan R.; And Others
TITLE Teacher Team Collaborative Action Research as Staff Development.
PUB DATE Nov 96
NOTE 31p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Middle School Association (23rd, Baltimore, MD, October 31-November 3, 1996).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Action Research; Case Studies; Inclusive Schools; Intermediate Grades; Junior High Schools; *Mainstreaming; *Middle Schools; Program Evaluation; Qualitative Research; Special Education; *Staff Development; *Teacher Collaboration
IDENTIFIERS *Collaborative Research; Symbolic Interactionism

ABSTRACT

Using a symbolic interactionism theoretical perspective, this project examined the merits of team collaborative action research as a tool in comprehensive staff development for middle- grade teachers. The specific question examined during the action research was how inclusion of special needs students affects the academic and social achievement of other students. During the month-long planning phase, special and regular education teachers and an instructional coordinator met with a university researcher to discuss their beliefs about research and the research questions. During the baseline phase, each teacher observed and interviewed at least three students, compiled individual and standardized test scores, and reflected on their results. During the 3-month action phase, teachers took various actions and collected data to define inclusion effects. Three suggestions emerged from the action phase: (1) inclusion classes should contain as few special education students as practical; (2) inclusion classes should contain a good mix of above average students to be used as peer tutors; and (3) inclusion classes should be scheduled early in the day. During the reflection phase, teachers noted the positive impact of teaming, the increase in reflective teaching, the enhanced communication, and the opportunity to put theory into practice. Examination of the teacher's group interactions during the action research project indicated that teacher team collaborative action research served as a form of self-reflective questioning which enabled practitioners to better understand and solve problems of interest to them in their own educational setting. (Contains 8 references.) (KDFB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 402 060

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Teacher Team Collaborative Action Research As Staff Development

Dan R. Saurino

University of Georgia

Linda W. Crawford, Cawood C. Cornelius, Vicki Dillard, Janet French,

Margaret G. McSwain, Marilark S. Murray, J. Russ Upton, Johnny Walraven

Sonoraville East Middle School

Penny L. Saurino

Red Bud Elementary School

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Dan R. Saurino
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

Paper presented at the annual meeting of the National Middle School Association,

Baltimore, November, 1996

Running Head: ACTION STAFF DEVELOPMENT

PS 024830

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Teacher Team Collaborative Action Research As Staff Development

Our interest in collaborative action research, teachers conducting research in their own classroom with the assistance of university researchers, arose because it was a means by which teachers could examine questions associated with their own practice, initiate strategies and techniques to attempt answers to the questions, and reflect on their findings in an atmosphere that provided guidance and methodology. The goal of this type of research has been to help teachers develop professionally and to allow university researchers to keep in touch with current problems and practical solutions in the classroom. In addition, we were interested in examining the merits of team collaborative action research (McLaughlin, Earle, Hall, Miller, & Wheeler, 1995; Saurino, 1996) as one tool in a comprehensive staff development program for middle grades education.

Background

At this time of strong public concern throughout the nation over quality education, it is significant to note the continued and widespread positive interest in middle level education. Efforts to provide an appropriate education of quality for early adolescents continue unabated with both new middle schools springing up and major efforts to implement middle school concepts on-going in already existing middle schools. We believe that as the middle school concept continues to develop, collaborative action research can be used to help answer questions which inevitably arise in an expanding field like middle level education. An important area of development in the middle school concept is the formation of teacher teams. This study examined the use of collaborative action research by a middle school teacher team as part of their staff development program. As the study progressed, it became evident that once the teacher team became proficient in the methodology of teacher team collaborative action research, they also

became more autonomous in its use. In addition, they began to benefit from how much they were learning and how much more efficiently the teaching team was working together in the planning, coordination, and integration of their curriculum.

There has been very little research published about the use of collaborative action research in a middle grades (grades 6-8) setting, and even less about the process of conducting collaborative action research in a group. Therefore, a main emphasis of this study was to include a detailed account of the process a group of collaborators went through learning and using collaborative action research. There are a variety of definitions for this type of research (McTaggart, 1991) and similar processes are referred to by a variety of terms (i.e., teacher research, teacher inquiry, participatory research, classroom inquiry), but for the purposes of this study "action research" refers to research conducted by teachers in their classroom setting and involving the teacher and students native to that particular setting (Saurino, 1995). The research begins with a question of interest to the teachers and involves the teachers "actions," or interventions (strategies and techniques) used in an attempt to answer the research question. Data are gathered before, during, and after the actions in a variety of ways and reflected upon before the process continues. In this way the research becomes cyclic in nature, forming planning-action-reflection cycles.

The addition of the word "collaborative" to action research implies, again for the purposes of this study since there are a variety of definitions, that the participants "collaborate" with each other in a group setting and with other researchers to help with the design and implementation of the research. The action research process in this study involved the identification of questions to be researched by the participants, the formation of a plan of "action" in which we attempted to answer the questions, the collection of data in various forms to substantiate the effects of the

action, and reflection upon the results of the action and the data collected. The cycle was then repeated, using the information gained to alter the questions to be researched.

The term "teacher team" refers to a middle school concept of team teaching in which the four main content area teachers (mathematics, science, social studies, and language arts) plus one or more special education teachers worked with a group of students in an effort to provide a coordinated, inter-disciplinary educational environment. The teachers had a common planning period in which they could collaborate with each other and other participants. In this study, the "team" which met regularly as a group included the four content area teachers, three special education teachers, the school's instructional coordinator, and a university researcher. Other participants helped at various times to coordinate the planning, methodology, data collection, or written reporting of the research. The study reported herein represents our attempt to not only document the process of teacher team collaborative action research, but to explore how the interactions of a group setting affected the process of staff development.

In the past, action research has concentrated on single teachers, but with the expanding use of teacher teams, there is a need to modify existing action research techniques to incorporate the use of these teams. Therefore, another goal of this study was to examine the process of teacher team collaborative action research and extend the educational research literature in the area of "group" collaborative action research as it might be applied in a staff development program.

In an attempt to meet these goals and maintain a focus on the group aspect of the process, we designed the study around the chronological cycles of action research, but concentrated our data collection on the group meetings which were scheduled regularly throughout the study. Collaboration was used as a means of bridging the gap between the autonomous environment of

public education and university research to provide both groups with needed information.

Theory and Method

The theoretical perspective followed in this study was symbolic interactionism. It is compatible with the phenomenological perspective, but is more specialized in attempting to understand the process of human interaction, especially the dynamics of group interaction. Symbolic interactionism narrows the scope of phenomenology by concentrating on the meanings, actions, and interpretations derived through social interaction. In team participation three premises of symbolic interactionism were of importance. First, human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them. Second, the meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with others. Third, these meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interactive process used by the person in dealing with the things encountered (Blumer, 1969). Symbolic interactionism views meaning as arising in the process of interaction between people, thus as social products, as creations that are formed in and through the defining activities of people as they interact. It is this premise that is closely aligned with the methodology of teacher team collaborative action research.

This study intended to meet the need for teaching teams to understand the process of collaborative action research and how it might benefit their unique needs. The specific purpose of this study was to examine an effort by a middle school teaching team to conduct teacher team collaborative action research as part of their staff development program. The study focused on the group interactions of the teaching team, the understandings we came to as a result of the interactions, and how the new understandings might be used in practice.

The design of this study is that of a qualitative case study (Merriam, 1988), specifically a

particularistic, descriptive, heuristic, inductive inquiry (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). We wanted to study the process of group collaborative action research as it might be adapted to middle level teacher teams and found it appropriate to concentrate on the group meetings themselves, the only place all the questions in the study were addressed. Since this study focused on a case that was "qualitative" in nature, data gathering and analysis techniques characteristic of qualitative research were emphasized (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Dey, 1993; Merriam, 1988). The middle school in which this study takes place is located in a growing rural town in the southeastern United States. The school contains about 650 students of which twelve percent were identified with special needs. The school has recently received a state award as a "School of Excellence" and national recognition as a "Blue Ribbon School." It has a quality staff and is well supported by parents and the community.

Data collection was "triangulated" by establishing different data sources and collectors (Merriam, 1988). Data were collected by all participants and were constantly shared and discussed in the group meetings. The various sources of data included: (1) personal logs from the participants, (2) audio taped interviews (transcribed) of the group meetings, (3) observations (with field notes), (4) student surveys produced by the group, (5) various test scores, and (6) interviews with the students. In addition to the data analysis which had been ongoing throughout the project, final data analysis began in earnest after the end of the first research cycle. Organization and presentation of data for the final research report was derived from the categories of (1) individual teacher actions and understandings, (2) the research questions, (3) the group interactions, and (4) our reflections and discussions of the project and its use as a staff development course.

Results indicated that Teacher Team Collaborative Action Research is a form of self-reflective questioning which enables practitioners to better understand and solve problems of interest to them in their own educational setting. It aims at enriching the practical judgment of practitioners in problematic situations and gives them one set of tools with which ongoing personal development can be achieved. The addition of group interaction and dynamics to a more traditional collaborative action research model was beneficial to the process.

Research Questions

There were two levels of questions examined in this study. First, there was the question concerning staff development that was addressed by the entire group:

What are the beneficial and detrimental aspects of teacher team collaborative action research as part of a comprehensive staff development program?

Second, there was the action research question addressed by the teaching team as they learned the process of conducting teacher team collaborative action research. It was a question of interest to the group and involved the particular model of "Inclusion" used at the middle school:

How does inclusion of students with special needs in the regular classroom affect the academic and social achievement of students identified as above average, average, and below average?

The Inclusion Model

It is important to identify the particular model of inclusion used at the middle school, since "inclusion" appears to mean different things to different people. To some, it means literally placing every child in the regular classroom no matter what the severity of the disability. To others, it means only including children who are not disruptive enough to distract from the education received by the rest of the class. Our model basically included students who had

demonstrated the skills and behavior needed to be successful in the regular classroom setting. Our model included students with specific learning disabilities, emotional and behavior disorders, and intellectual disabilities. In our model, these students were combined, along with their special education teacher, in a regular education classroom. Our inclusion classes incorporated only those students served by special education for whom inclusion was appropriate. Students who need alternative instructional environments, teaching strategies, and/or materials that could not be provided within the context of a regular classroom were placed in a more appropriate special education classroom. However, most students served by the special education teachers at our school benefitted from at least some exposure to the regular classroom. The school system provided a separate program for the severely and profoundly disabled students, and pullout programs for children with severe skill deficits.

Our model also utilized "co-teaching" as a vehicle for inclusion. Co-teaching allowed the special education teacher to assist the regular classroom teacher during inclusion classes, and produced a positive environment for the students. Students thought they were "lucky" to have two teachers and the stigma of receiving special help was removed. The students often did not even realize they were still in special education. However, in order for our model to work, all students must perceive the special education teacher as another teacher within the classroom. The regular education teacher and the special education teacher should co-teach from the very first day, avoiding labels such as "special" or "regular" teacher. Students do not "belong" to either teacher. All the students in the classroom should be taught as a collaborative effort between both teachers.

This study was an attempt to support or deny our belief that our inclusion model benefited

children with disabilities both academically and socially. We believe the regular classroom environment bolstered their academic progress, because they were held to higher expectations, exposed to more challenging content, and inspired by the example of their non-disabled peers. We also believe they benefited socially because they saw models of appropriate social behavior and became "friends" with regular education children. Finally, we believe our inclusion model also benefited non-disabled students. They became more tolerant of and learned to appreciate human differences. They may also have benefitted from instruction that was more individualized because of increased staffing. Extra support was given to all students in the regular education classroom. The students that benefitted the most were the "borderline" or "at risk" students. Those students did not quaiify for any special services because they did not meet criteria for exceptional education classes. Either the general education or the exceptional education teacher instructed a class while the remaining teacher worked with children who needed extra support. Roles were flexible enough to allow the regular and exceptional education teachers to exchange roles, whether it involved delivering content or assuming a supportive role. For us, inclusion is a "belief system" in which all professionals, administrators, teachers, and parents involved believe in the philosophy that inclusion is best for students. It was to that end that we sought support or opposition during this study.

Findings

In this section, we will discuss the process of conducting teacher team collaborative action research, reflect on the data associated with the action research questions, and examine the application of this type of research as a staff development course. We will frame the discussion around the chronological steps in the research process.

The Action Research Cycle

The study began with about a month of planning, beginning in November, 1996, including group meetings and individual discussions among participants. During this period we discussed teacher team collaborative action research, the project we were undertaking, the questions for the project, and our schedule. The meetings focused on what the teachers believed related to middle grades teaching, inclusion, and research in the middle grades. For clarification, the group meetings normally included the following participants:

Linda: Instructional coordinator for the middle school

Vicki: Language Arts teacher of the seventh grade teaching team

Russ: Social Studies teacher of the seventh grade teaching team

Margaret: Mathematics teacher of the seventh grade teaching team

Johnny: Science teacher of the seventh grade teaching team

Cawood: Special Education teacher of the seventh grade teaching team

Janet: Special Education teacher from a sixth grade teaching team

Marilark: Special Education teacher from an eighth grade teaching team

Dan: University researcher collaborating with the teaching team

Some typical responses regarding the beliefs of the teachers concerning research at the beginning of the research follow (from discussions in January, 1996).

Marilark: I think qualitative research is more useful for educators than quantitative because I just don't understand the quantitative when I read research. I think all this sounds more functional and practical for regular people.

Johnny: Well, I'm glad that you said that because I'm the opposite. Going into this I was real

worried about it not being quantitative. Russ and I had talked about that a lot. I'm glad that you explained it. It makes more sense now.

Dan: That's why I've gotten into qualitative, because I feel that it is better for the practical application of teachers. I think qualitative is the way to begin.

During the early meetings the teachers were asked to discuss their beliefs relative to the research we were undertaking by answering the following question.

Dan: Does inclusion of students with special needs affect the academic and social achievement of 7th grade students identified as below average, average, and above average?

Margaret: I think that inclusion does effect behavior.

Dan: How do you think it does?

Margaret: From observation of identified students, more socially. We've noticed it in the lunchroom. They do not isolate themselves as special education students anymore. They intermingle with the other students, regular students. I have seen them helping in classes.

Cawood: I have seen improvements in behavior and academic achievement in my special ed. students. What I'd like to know is how it effects the other students, regular ed. students, and with me coming in (co-teaching), I don't know because I've not taught regular ed. classes without my students in there. I don't know if the inclusion of special needs kids affects them. I'd like to know if it's a good effect or a negative effect.

Johnny: I think the lower, or the special kids are helped in every way. I think their academics and the things they're doing now socially are improving, they're taking part in class a lot. Our upper level kids, I think socially, they're helped a lot, too. But, I think academically, they're suffering a little bit. Academically, they're held back. The gifted kids and the above average kids, I think we're not exposing them to quite as much as we might.

Dan: Do you think it effects the average student?

Johnny: Not as much.

Vicki: I agree with Johnny. I think it helps all of them socially. Academically, I can think of specific people (regular ed) in our inclusion class that I feel are held back academically. I agree that it benefits the special ed. all the way around. Maybe the below average, I believe it benefits them. But I believe that gifted kids, and the above average kids, and probably even the average kids are being held back academically.

Russ: I think the average kid, and maybe the below average kid, may be hurt some academically because they will take the easy way out. They're going to do just what they have to get done and nothing more so that pulls them down some. If they're in a class where they're exposed to a little more they'd get a little more out of it.

Marilark: I feel that inclusion probably does not effect the academic achievement of any student in a negative way. The reason I think this is because when you go into the regular classroom there are kids with disabilities who have not been identified and these students are basically equal to those students who are labeled with disabilities. I think that within the regular ed. classroom you already have such a diverse group that all

> you do when you add kids who are labeled with learning disabilities and behavior disorders is put some more bodies into the classroom I think that socially it does not effect anybody in a negative way. Kids who are labeled with disabilities, it can affect some of them positively and some of them in negative ways. Positive ways, they're glad that they're not being pulled out of the classroom. Negative ways, if you are not very discreet about giving them modifications, they'll refuse those modifications and therefore don't get the guidance they need with certain academic skills because they want to be like everybody else.

It is important to note here the lack of consistency in the beliefs of the various teachers. Once we were aware of the differences in thinking, it became clear that support for a particular point of view was necessary and we focused our attention on the various possibilities, collected data, and reflected on the data in terms of answering the inclusion research question (we did not address the staff development issue until late in the cycle).

The next phase of the research, beginning in January, 1996, was what we referred to as collecting "baseline data." We studied what the situation was at that point in time and collected data to substantiate our observations. Each teacher chose three or more students as their "sample" and categorized them as below average, average, or above average. Student interviews were conducted, observations were made and documented, other teachers were consulted, and individual and standardized test scores were compiled. Finally, we reflected on the data we had gathered. Some of the teachers were impressed with what they discovered as noted in the following comments.

Cawood: (January 24, 1996) I really enjoyed doing the student interviews. This is probably the

first time I've ever sat down and interviewed a student to find out what they actually thought about what was going on. The most surprising thing that I found out was that most if not all of the students did not know exactly what inclusion is and were not aware of why I (the special ed. Teacher) was in the room.

Marilark: When I did my interviews I found out that a lot of the regular ed. students did not know what inclusion was and had not given a lot of thought to why I (special ed. Teacher) was in the room. The special ed. students had more of an idea of what inclusion was because they realized they had been pulled out for their special ed. classes in the past. Some of the regular ed. students even knew I was a special ed. teacher.

Janet: I noticed the same thing.

Vicki: Both of the students I interviewed thought they were being helped socially. One said that he felt that when he got a job later in life he would have to deal with different types of people. As far as academically they felt I moved a little slower than I would if the special ed. kids weren't in there. They did mention some disruptions and two of the kids they named were special ed. However, both students felt they could get more individual help with two teachers in the classroom. They did say they felt that it helped them academically to have another teacher in the room.

Margaret: Both of the students I interviewed were doing better this year. I felt good about it when I interviewed them because they really feel better about themselves this year because they are achieving, their grades have improved.

Russ: Both of the students I interviewed felt that academically they had not been affected

one way or the other and they thought they had more friends from different social groups.

Linda: It sounds like the children are more concerned with the teachers' time being taken with misbehaving students than it is the teachers' time being taken to help the slower learner. It sounds like even the average kids get more help.

Russ: We have always included alot of students in social studies who would be pulled out for other subjects. This year with the second teacher in the room I have been able to move as fast if not faster with the inclusion class than I have in years past.

By the end of the "baseline" data phase of the cycle the team had a grasp of the current situation and began to look at how we would go about answering the inclusion research question. Thus began the next phase of the cycle, the "action" phase in which we took various actions and collected data in an effort to better define how inclusion was affecting students both academically and socially. Different members of the group compared test scores of students in and out of inclusion classes, student surveys were created with specific questions related to inclusion, classes were examined in relation to time of day to see if early classes were different from later classes, other teachers and administrators were interviewed, and special education students were taken out of inclusion classes for periods of time to compare the class environment with and without the special students.

The action phase of the research cycle was the longest phase, beginning in February and continuing until April, 1996. As actions were taken, the team reflected on the findings and a direction for the research emerged. It became apparent that the data indicated that the social aspects of inclusion were definable. The group agreed that below average and special education

students benefitted from the social interactions of inclusion. In addition, there was agreement that average, above average, and gifted students might also benefit, but at least were not adversely affected socially. Academics, however, were more difficult to define and the reflection meetings led us to focus on two aspects of the question. First, we wanted to know if the teaching "pace" was effected. Were teachers teaching at a slower pace as a result of the included students? Second, we wanted to examine whether the "level" of teaching was effected. Was material being presented at a lower level due to the presence of the special students? Early data contained conflicting findings. For example, Cawood's journal of teacher interviews contained the following quotes from two different teachers, (February, 1996) "The pace is obviously slower in an inclusion class. It takes an inordinate amount of time to complete ordinary tasks like opening the book or sharpening pencils and sitting down. Inclusion students require more repetition and a slower pace in many cases." and, "I believe that the pace of this class has increased because in earlier years special education students were mainstreamed into my class and the instruction was slower, but with the extra teacher to help with instruction and monitoring of all the students, the pace in these classes has been increased."

By the middle of the action phase, perceptions of the team began to become more focused on the research and how the process was working. The following exchange occurred during one of our reflection meetings.

Dan: (March 13, 1996) How do you feel about the process so far and what changes have you noticed?

Cawood: It has really helped me to find out other peoples perceptions of the special education program. Even though there are differences I believe it does us good to discuss the

differences and work through them as a team.

Johnny: I don't know what it is, maybe I'm just thinking about it more, but I've been noticing a lot of things. We've been doing cooperative learning groups where each group gives a presentation for videotaping. I am amazed that everyone has something they can do. One student who has problems with reading and written work is artistically incredible. He is doing the visual aids for his group while someone else is doing the research. One student who also has problems in reading and writing has turned out to be a great speaker. It has opened my mind to what we are doing and how things are going, it has really helped me to start thinking about things. When you have to write it down you have to think about it. I am starting to see the positive aspects (of inclusion), and there is definitely some weight to those good points.

Linda: One of the students that was mentioned was in a group that won the school-wide science fair.

Janet: The two students I interviewed focused on having two teachers in the room and thought that they were able to get help quicker.

Margaret: I talked to an average student who wanted to be in an inclusion math class so that he could get extra help. Other students also agreed that they liked the inclusion classes because of the individual attention from two teachers.

Russ: The student-teacher ratio keeps coming up as the main positive of having the second teacher in the classroom. The change in myself has been a chance to try new things and change the way the classroom runs.

Marilark: (Reading quotes from her teacher interview journal) "Two teachers makes more

resources available to the students, exposes them to different teaching styles, better classroom management, and more immediate feedback."

The constraints of this paper do not allow a great deal of specific data to be included, yet we wanted to point out that some of our data collection was able to give us a detailed look at findings. The following is an excerpt from a meeting in which we discussed responses to the student survey we had created.

Cawood: (April 24, 1996) I completed the student surveys. The first question was, "Do you think that having classes with students that are involved in special education affected you academically?" Of the total, 70% answered that there was no effect having the special ed. students on the team, 13% answered that there may have been effects of having class with special ed. students, and 17% answered that there had been some effect on their academic because of the special ed. students. Of that group, more than half said that it had affected them in a positive way. The next question was, "Do you think that having class with special ed. students has effected you socially? (For example, your friends, your behavior?) 55% of the total answer was no on that one, 11% answered that there may have been some effect, and 24% answered that yes it did affect them. Once again, the majority of the student answered that the effect was positive.

I divided the students into those with a co-teaching (inclusion) class, and those who were not co-taught. We had 43 regular education students that were involved in a co-teaching class that answered the survey, and 27 regular education students that were not in a co-teaching class. 20% of those in co-teaching classes said they had

been effected by the special ed. students, and 64% said there was no effect, and 17% said that they may have been effected. Again, most indicated that there had been a positive effect. Of the 27 regular education students who were not involved in co-teaching classes, 15% said they had been effected by special ed. students, 74% indicated that there had been no effect, and 11% indicated that they may have been effected. 28% of the regular education students in co-teaching classed indicated that they had been effected socially (53% said that they it was a positive effect). 96% said that they had learned the same or more than last year, and 96% said they had accomplished more or the same socially as previous years.

Margaret: I took the results of the ITBS (standardized test) that was given spring of 1996 and did a gain/loss with the total of reading and math on the students involved in inclusion classes. They came up with a 3.8 total gain. I also did the students not involved in an inclusion class. They had a 2.9 total gain. The classes involved in inclusion had the greater increase in growth on the ITBS by almost a year.

At about this point in the action phase of the research, the team began to reflect about how the process was affecting them in terms of professional development. Although discussed more at the end of the cycle, even at this phase of the research the teachers were beginning to be aware of what they were learning. The following are examples typical of their responses.

Dan: How has the (survey) process affected you?

Cawood: I really think that it created a dialog not only between myself and the other teachers, but between myself and the students. It also helped explain to them what my role was as a special education teacher on the team. I think that it helped more of them realize

that I am a real teacher down there. Before there may have been some perception problems about what my job was.

Marilark: I removed my special education students from the inclusion classroom for two weeks. I continued the same activities with the special education students that were used with the regular education students. When we returned to the inclusion class we found that the special education students were not behind. They had the same test that the regular class had while they were out. I compared the test grades, and they were in the same range as the regular education students. I then interviewed the teachers after my absence. I found that in general the pace of class was not slowed by the presence of the special education students, and that the instructional level was not lowered by these students. The mathematics teacher said, "I can see how it (inclusion) might change the way things are taught in other classes, such as literature, but classes like science and mathematics are taught on the same level. It's as basic as it is going to get." It made me realize that the teachers do not think that my presence in there slows the pace, or lowers the instructional level. One of the teacher said that my being in there had given her the opportunity to meet the needs of students with higher level needs, like the gifted, because we have modified their instruction to give them more challenging assignments.

As might be expected some problems with the model surfaced during the process. Discussions, interventions, and reflections about the problem helped define it and allowed the group to recommend changes for the future. An example follows.

Janet: I took my (inclusion) students out for about a week to see what kind of effect it

would have. I interviewed the teachers and they did not notice any difference with the students being gone.

Linda: May I ask how many students do you have in there?

Janet: Three. I think that is important, because if you put too many special education students in there it becomes just like a special education class. One of my classes is like a lower end class and I have about five special education kids in there and it is not nearly as productive as this other class. With the low kids and the special ed. kids it is just not a productive class.

Marilark: My language arts teacher sees no difference, but I have only two (inclusion) student in that class, and that is a high level class anyway. That is the class where I also modify for the gifted students, but I can see that if I had a lot of special ed. kids and a lot of slower learners it would make a big difference. I know last year I did inclusion in the lowest reading class and I said never again! This year I am in the intermediate reading class and we have had much better results and a much better experience.

Later in the discussion, Marilark was able to better define the problem, which was later substantiated by the other teachers and recommendations made. The exchange follows.

Dan: Summarize the problem for us now.

Marilark: In the lower level class it came to the point that everybody and their mother needed to be modified. I physically could not modify for all those students.

Dan: So you spent so much time with the regular education students that you could not meet the needs of the special ed. students?

Marilark: Yes, it was terrible. We had a large class and I would say that only about 5 were on

what I would call a functional reading level. When we put the special education students in an intermediate reading class it was much better. There was modeling going on and we could group better readers with the special education students.

Vicki: Most of the low level classes are where we find behavior problems and then when we put the inclusion students in there, we just get more trouble. They just feed off each other.

Linda: This research involves special education inclusion, but we also are including Title I (at risk) students as well this year. This problem has surfaced here. The inclusion is going well except in some lower level classes. The concerns from the classroom teachers are that there are no students that are high level enough for modeling or peer tutoring to be going on because all the students are having such problems. I think we have decided that if we are doing inclusion we might not want to do it with classes that lack higher level students regardless of the reason.

The most interesting aspect of the action phase of the research was that as more interventions (actions) were completed, the team began to agree more about how the data was indicating answers to the research questions. Some of the teachers changed their mind about how inclusion was affecting the students and others had their beliefs confirmed by the data. The result was that a consensus was developing. Some examples follow.

Johnny: When Cawood took his students out I thought that it would be much better. I thought that there would be a dramatic difference, because he does have some students that need a lot of help getting started and staying on task. On that first day it was quieter, and I was more efficient getting started, but the more I thought about it I

realized that most of the differences were fairly superficial. When I looked at what we had accomplished with and without him it seemed like we did more when Cawood and his kids were in there. Once you get past the superficial type things I found that I was not doing the projects, video taping, and a lot of things that two teachers can do. I was not able to do them alone. I found that we did more with Cawood in there. I was really shocked. I did not realize this was happening until I began to take a look at it and put it down on paper. That really surprised me. I also interviewed some teachers. I found that our gifted kids, and our above average kids have really benefited socially. They are more outgoing. One of their teachers from last year said, "They are not so stressed out." They seemed to have different types of friends. We talking about how last year you could tell who was special ed., regular ed., and gifted by where, and with whom they sat in the lunchroom. This year we don't have that. We don't have those little clicks. I think that inclusion this year has been very good for all the kids that I studied. In Cawood's class there is a mix of special ed., regular ed., and gifted at almost every table. It is textbook cooperative learning. It has been really eye opening for me.

Vicki: I have my (inclusion) class 5th period, and there are a lot of kids that are already low level in there, but I have three or four that are above average. Those three or four are the ones all along that I believed it (inclusion) did hurt. When Cawood took his kids out I could notice a difference. Then we also rotated the schedule for a week. During that week my 5th period was 2nd period. It was very eye-opening to me. I would have never have thought that class could have behaved and worked like that.

They finished their spelling and other work. They have never done that before. But the 2nd period class that moved to 5th, that was usually good, was terrible the whole week. So, I believe that a lot of it has to do with time of day. I have been the one all along that said that the inclusion students slowed both my level and pace in that class, but now I think a lot of it is time of day. Maybe we should think about having the inclusion language arts class before lunch.

Note the continued process of problem solving and recommendations for improvement of the model. To summarize, the three main suggestions that emerged from the research process follow: (1) inclusion classes should contain as few special education students as is practical, (2) inclusion classes should contain a good mix of above average students to be used as peer tutors and in cooperative learning groups, and (3) inclusion classes should be scheduled early in the day.

Staff Development Perspectives

The final phase of the research cycle was reflection. The team reflected on the data related to the inclusion research question, the direction the research was leading, possible questions for the next cycle of research, and finally how teacher team collaborative research had faired as a staff development course. Comments typical for the group follow.

Russ: What struck me was that the survey started discussion in class about what special ed. is and what it does. It showed that the kids did not understand what special ed. was. In the survey one student said she did not like special ed. kids and did not associate with them. The interesting part was that because of this process she found that one of her best friends was a special ed. student. The process changed the students perception.

Margaret: I had a discussion with the class about the survey. They had no idea what so ever of what a learning disability was. I explained how LD kids have normal I.Q.'s, but just have a problem in certain areas. The kids were totally amazed. We mentioned Cawood and one boy said he had no idea what he did at the start of the year. It was not until we started doing this research that he realized he was a teacher. My reflections are that I have not really changed my ideas (about inclusion), in fact a lot of my views have been strengthened. And I think the kids realize that they have benefited.

Linda: We have three special education teachers here, and I was just wondering if the inclusion process made you feel more a part of the school and more included? Do you think that it has made a difference in your socialization?

Janet: I think so because I know more about what goes on school wide. Since I get to go into regular education classes I understand more about what regular ed. teachers have to deal with. That gave me a different perspective.

Cawood: I think that you have hit on it, us actually being on teaching teams and being aware of what is going on. It makes us feel more included, rather than being separated.

Dan: Could you reflect on changes in teaching, or your thoughts about the process?

Margaret: Basically I guess I changed my mind about the research process we were using. I really doubted the validity of what we were doing initially. Then I realized we were not out to impress anyone else but here to answer questions for ourselves as a team. I learned that this is a valid process for a team. We knew that socially the students were helped but academically we found they were also helped. The team works

together to investigate an area that concerns us. We became a team more aware of our students, of ourselves, and have become more unified. We took something we had already knocked around and zeroed in on it, looked at it like under a microscope. I think it has been a very worthy staff development project.

Cawood: I believe the teachers have benefitted by working with a more diverse student population, not just myself by working with average and above average students, but the regular ed. teachers working with the special ed. students. I believe this has given everybody a different perspective of what we do. I really believe that communication is the key to any team project and it has helped us this year having a unifying question to discuss. It has created an open forum for our team to express ideas and realize there are a lot of different opinions about things we have done. I think we have worked with these differences and become closer as a team. I have learned about myself as a teacher and others as well. Vicki's teaching this year was incredible. It has changed her.

Johnny: Over all this is the best thing I've ever done. We used to think we were teaming. I think we did a good job in the past but now we really know how to work together. This by far is the best thing I've ever done as far as actually being practical. Something I'll use and reuse. I think we answered the question that inclusion has no negative effect academically on any of the children and in fact may be a positive thing for them. Socially it was a benefit for everybody. Not only did we answer a question that we wanted to know the answer to, but we also learned how to work with people and communicate better. I'm embarrassed to say that in ten years this has been the

first time I ever sat down with a student and said, "What do you think about what I'm doing." It is something I never thought to do before. Now even outside this project I ask, "How did that go? Did you like that? How can we change that?" It is like you have a customer and never asked what they wanted. I will look at children more as individuals now, and next year I will individualize more and try earlier to find out which buttons to push on different kids.

Russ: I think that what makes our inclusion model work and some inclusion models not work is the extra teacher in the classroom. The teacher student ratio in the inclusion class was 1:15. As staff development I thought it worked real well to open up communication channels between teachers. I think we, like students, will do more if we are interested in a subject too. It helps us remember what we learned.

Vicki: The communication between teachers and students has increased too. I feel that I learned a lot about inclusion and about my students.

Marilark: I would like to research in the future some criteria for kids in regard to who should and shouldn't be included, we are still doing a lot of trial and error. I've changed my mind about this type of research, at first I thought it was kind of hokey. Even though I really wanted to know the answer to these question, I thought this was kind of a goofy way of going about doing it. I changed my mind. I think this is the best way of going about finding an answer because the only thing we are really concerned with is us and our situation.

Janet: The Collaborative Action research model has been beneficial because it has allowed me to answer a question that has relevance to my everyday teaching life without

encumbering me with unnecessary requirements in how to go about it. This method has allowed me to gather data without absorbing a huge amount of time. Also, it has allowed me insight into student and teacher opinions and attitudes about inclusion. Thirdly, I think this research will enable me to make better teaching decisions related to inclusion in the future.

The curriculum director for the school system (Anne Vaughn) sat in on one of our reflection meetings and her comments after the meeting are worthy of note.

Anne: I think the thing that affected me most was to see how well they learn from each other. The socialization of these teachers was great. Communication is such a crucial issue in the schools. Special ed. people have felt isolated. Now the regular ed. teachers are understanding better their situation and the special ed. Teachers are understanding regular ed. better. In terms of staff development it is wonderful to listen to Johnny, it has raised some issues in his mind that are personally important and he is really doing individual learning. The training ground for his development is in his classroom and he has had to evaluate what is going on with the kids and what is going on with them personally. The reflection aspect of staff development is extremely important and one that is not often exercised by many staff development programs. I think this makes a great staff development (course) because they have the theory, and they are actually putting it into practice. This is something I would like to see more teachers accomplish.

Finally, we close with the reflections of the two non-teaching members of the team and their recommendations about the process in terms of staff development.

Linda: It is staff development in its truest form. These teachers are beginning to look at things more deeply not only in terms of how it relates to their classroom but to the whole school. Staff development is to bring about change. Everyone of them, and I as well, are going to begin to change things because of this process. I've noticed it carries over to other aspects of teaching.

Dan: My hope is that when I leave this middle school, I will leave nine people who know this research process. It is cyclical so it can be continued. It can be one tool in your arsenal for staff development. It can be used with a significant percentage of teachers and although it takes more time than a workshop, it offers many benefits. Not only have we concentrated on the teachers that changed their minds or developed new ideas, but we also noted that Cawood, Marilark, and Margaret confirmed positively what they already believed and now better understand their beliefs. I think the process worked very well.

References

Blumer, H. (1969). Symbolic interactionism. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Bogdan, R., & Biklen, S. (1992). Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theory and methods (2nd Ed.). Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Dey, I. (1993). Qualitative data analysis: A user friendly guide for social scientists. New York: Routledge.

Merriam, S. B. (1988). Case study research in education: A qualitative approach. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

McLaughlin, H. J., Earle, K., Hall, M., Miller, V., & Wheeler, M. (1995). Hearing from our students: Team action research in a middle school. Middle School Journal, 26(3), 7-13.

McTaggart, R. (1991). Principles for participatory action research. Adult Education Quarterly, 41 (3), 168-187.

Saurino, D. R. (April, 1996). Teacher team collaborative action research. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New York.

Saurino, D. R., & Saurino, P. L. (1996, April). Collaborative Action Research: The High Scope Curriculum for Georgia public schools. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New York.